

by 1st Lt. Kat Ohlmeyer

First Lt. Sergio Costilla (left), 318th Training Squadron, observes as Tech. Sgt. Henry Quezada, 318th TRS, explains the depot-level inspection of the reduction gear box, emphasizing foreign object damage prevention, to Inter-American Air Forces Academy students at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. Students from Colombia, Mexico and Ecuador are enrolled in a four-week course dedicated to the PT-6 turbo-propeller engine.



Training squadron offers opportunity for Spanish-speaking Airmen

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — First Lieutenant **Sergio A. Costilla** feels at home in his job, speaking his native language and taking frequent trips to Latin America.

Lieutenant Costilla, who was born in Mexico and didn't learn English until he was a teenager, is the Logistics and Information Systems Flight commander with the 318th Training Squadron at the Inter-American Air Forces Academy, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

The academy, founded in 1943, conducts professional, technical and management training in Spanish to armed forces, national police and gov-

ernmental agencies of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The eldest of four children, Lieutenant Costilla and his family immigrated to Laredo, Texas, when he was 13. His only knowledge of English was from a one-year course he won the opportunity to attend as a fifth-grader in Mexico. English didn't become his primary language until 1986 when he enlisted in the Air Force.

"I was in Army R.O.T.C. in high school, which lead me to join the service," he said. "I wanted to be a part of something bigger than me, but I never thought I would be an officer."

His role as an instructor makes him even more proud.

"Being an instructor here is a unique assignment which offers unique experiences," he said. "It's one of the places in the Air Force where you can really relate to the people in Latin America."

In addition to being instructors, Lt. Col. **Andy Sanchez**, 318th TRS commander, said his people serve as ambassadors for the United States.

"It's their responsibility to ensure that each student returns to his country not only with the knowledge, training and skills necessary for them to successfully do their jobs, but to leave them with an understanding of the

democratic, American way of life we all enjoy," Colonel Sanchez said.

Another good aspect of the job is that "you get paid to use your language; the language you love," Lieutenant Costilla said.

Instructors at the academy must be staff sergeants or above, fluent in Spanish and have scored well on the Defense Language Proficiency Test. In addition, they should be in one of the specialties taught at the academy which range from aircraft maintenance to information systems. Opportunities are available for people in other specialties — professional military education or on-the-job training courses.

"We often hire Airmen from other Air Force specialty codes to meet the growing demands of our Latin American customers," the colonel said.

As for Lieutenant Costilla, he can't say enough about how much he enjoys his job.

"Meeting people from Latin America — from different backgrounds and cultures — is rewarding. There's a lot to learn from them," he said. "Being here has opened my eyes to a world that I knew existed, but I didn't realize the extent of it."

— 1st Lt. Kat Ohlmeyer
37th Training Wing Public Affairs

For more info

Get details about the 318th TRS and instructor opportunities at <http://www.lackland.af.mil/iaaf-apub/>.